



EMIGRATION TO A BETTER COUNTRY

THE CANADIAN EMIGRATION COMMISSION

TO THE UNITED STATES

OF AMERICA

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PREACHED IN

THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. JAMES, TORONTO,

ON

SAINT PATRICK'S DAY, 1842,

BEFORE THE

SOCIETIES OF ST. GEORGE, ST. PATRICK, & ST. ANDREW,

BY

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But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly.—HEB. xi. 16.

THE duties which we owe to our native land, have been so often and so forcibly impressed on your attention on occasions similar to the present,—and the theme is one, which even without advocacy, commends itself so fully to your feelings, that it seems almost unnecessary to expatiate on it, even although usage would point it out to me as the most appropriate subject for our anniversary sermon. The emotions, which the mere recurrence of our national festivals excites, are my witnesses that it needs not the art nor the power of a speaker to call forth the fond recollections of your father-land, which memory treasures up amidst her choicest stores, or to draw from you that manifestation of affection for your countrymen, which spontaneously gushes from the never-failing fountain of nature. No, my brethren,—although years may have passed away, since you left the sweet scenes of your boyhood and youth, and parted from those beloved relatives and friends, in the lap of whose tenderness and kindness your early hopes were nursed and reared,—although leagues of ocean roll between this land of your adoption and that which gave you birth,—although this fair and fertile Province has cherished you in its bosom, and has blessed many with prosperity, which home denied—yet am I persuaded that time has not effaced, nor distance dimmed, nor success in a

stranger-land clouded the bright colours of that picture of home, which the hand of nature herself has drawn with indelible touches and imperishable tints on the very core of your hearts.

Artificial tastes may change, and the same fashion, or conventional prejudice, which this year sets its arbitrary value on an object, may the next regard it as worthless, and substitute another in its place; but the feelings, which we as it were imbibed, whilst we hung upon the breast, and which have grown with our growth and strengthened with our strength, are as permanent as life itself. Nor would it be extravagant to assert, that the man who has ceased to feel the pulses of patriotism throb within him, and whose heart no longer beats with a quickened movement, when called on in a foreign land to prove that he remembers his country or his countrymen, cannot have the same principle of vitality in his frame, which circulates through the veins of human nature.

On these grounds, then, assuming that your national duties are sufficiently appreciated by you, I shall forego the reiteration of them at present, and leave, in perfect confidence in your patriotism and benevolence, the claims of your distressed brethren to plead their own cause with hearts, which, I am sure, are already predisposed in their favour.

In my text, a country is mentioned, in which we all—whatever may have been our natal soil—must feel the deepest and most abiding interest,—for that country is the birth-place of our soul—the eternal home, which we all at least profess an anxious desire to reach, when the period of our pilgrimage on earth shall have terminated. This heavenly country, although concealed by the screen of death from human vision, and generally obscured even from our thoughts by worldly cares and pleasures, yet asserts its right to paramount consideration, by those hopes and fears which it excites in our breasts; and there is within each of us the small still voice, (which we cannot silence) that warns us that we may not continue to disregard the claims which it urges.

It is to this land, which lies "beyond the clouds and beyond the tomb," that I would now direct your attention,—and your duties to it I purpose setting before you on the present occasion. And may God, in his mercy, grant that you may rise from the consideration of this subject with hearts resolved to discharge your obligations not merely towards your native country on earth, but towards that better land which you hope to have hereafter as your home.

The extent of the subject, which we have taken for our consideration, is obviously so great—embracing, as it does the regions of eternity, and the influences which our anticipations of them should exercise on our lives here—that I dare not hope to touch even slightly on all the prominent topics connected with it, within the limits of a discourse. It must suffice me, then, to present it to you in that point of view in which its chief features are most easily seen, and its practical effects most readily recognised,—and I shall therefore substitute for the slowness and irksomeness of argument, the more prompt and striking force of an illustration, appropriate to the circumstances of the majority of those who hear me.

You remember the time when your thoughts first turned on seeking a new home in a new world—you can recollect the anxious desire which you felt for obtaining full and accurate information, on which you might depend, regarding every particular connected with this then unknown land—you remember the eagerness with which you received and read any books, which, you were informed, gave a faithful description of it, or which offered advice to those who wished to settle in it,—you remember the keen appetite with which you devoured the statements contained in letters from this continent, which reached yourselves or your friends—with what absorbing interest you hung upon the lips of him who had visited this country—you remember that Canada was then the engrossing topic of your conversation—the ever present subject of your thoughts.

Permit me, my friends, to entreat you, to compare with this, your conduct and feelings regarding the last and eternal emigration from your earthly home to another world—an emigration, which as far transcends in its influence on your interests that to which I have just adverted, as eternity surpasses our measures of time or infinity exceeds our standards of space. That you have at some time or other thought (and thought seriously too) of this voyage, I can have no doubt. Our soul, hoodwink it as we may, and strive, as we best can, to circumscribe its vision to the scenes around us, still ever and anon turns a wistful eye towards the land beyond the grave, and forces us, despite our reluctance, to look forward to its native region. Even should we disregard the suggestions of this internal monitor, the casualties of life, which we experience ourselves, or see around us, (and the tears of the mourners still flow for a bereavement which affords a sad and solemn illustration of my words) enforce the warning in stern accents, which we must hear. We may, indeed, avert our eyes from the prospect, to which our spirit points us, but the thought is flashed upon us by the visitations of Providence, as those near us are struck down by death, or we ourselves are smitten with sickness or affliction—and on the awful lesson graven in these startling characters we can no more refuse to look and fix our gaze, than could Babylon's monarch of old turn his rivetted attention from that fiery alphabet, in which his destiny was written. No—my brethren, we cannot—we cannot—plead, that we have not thought of this migration. Let us then enquire, what effect these thoughts have produced upon us, and whether we have manifested the same interest concerning our residence for eternity that we have done regarding the change of our abode on earth. Of the future world, to which we are proceeding, there is but one guide-book—penned at the dictation of the Almighty himself. This blessed volume contains all that we know regarding that cloud-embosomed land, which impenetrable darkness shrouds from the eye of human enquiry, and the ice-bound flood of death separates in unexplored

seclusion by a barrier, over which adventurous discovery has never yet retraced its steps.

Have you, my brethren, consulted this book with that anxious desire to obtain information regarding the land to which you are to migrate for ever, which you formerly manifested, when occupied with the thoughts of leaving home and coming here? Have you received and read its descriptions of the future world with the same eagerness, which characterised your desire of being acquainted with this land, previously to embarkation for it? Have you meditated and pondered on the advice which it offers? Has the heavenly Canaan been the chosen topic of your conversation, the favourite subject of your thoughts? Is the edge of that keen appetite, which you felt for intelligence contained in letters from the land in which you purposed fixing your dwelling, all blunted and palled, when you are offered the perusal of communications from the Almighty himself regarding your eternal habitation? Has that absorbing interest, with which you regarded him who had returned from that stranger-land, vanished and gone, when you have the power of applying to one, who, launching forth on Death's stream, hath visited that bourne, whence no mortal traveller returns, and yet in the greatness of his strength, hath repassed the flood which parted him from life, and hath tracked the course, and pointed out the way, which leads us to everlasting happiness in a future world?—Alas! my friends, it is too evident, that the body outweighs the soul in general estimation—that time exceeds eternity—and the care of present and temporary enjoyment surpasses the provision for future and never-ending happiness. We thought it necessary, before we exchanged our native land for another country, to make diligent and minute enquiries regarding our altered circumstances; but who is there amongst us that has bestowed as much thought or as serious reflection on his new condition in a future world?

But let us pursue this illustration somewhat further. You remember, that when you had collected all the information,

which you could obtain from any quarter regarding this land of your adoption,—had carefully read every description of it, which you could procure,—had consulted and advised with those, in whose opinion you placed confidence,—and had thus supplied imagination with materials for etching the outline of the land beyond the western wave,—you remember, my brethren, that you were not satisfied with this, but felt that the most important part of your work yet remained to be done. You were not content with having merely enabled fancy to delineate with some fidelity this distant region, or having excited hope to light up the ideal landscape with her bright anticipations; no,—you knew that much preparation was necessary,—that many things were to be left behind as useless or injurious,—that others, either necessary or better adapted to your new home, were to be procured,—that stores for your voyage were to be laid in,—in short, you knew that you were undertaking a venture, on which your happiness was staked, and that you must exercise forethought and activity in providing every thing which might ensure your success in this perilous enterprise. You remember how your anxiety to have every thing ready, which you considered requisite, increased,—and how you redoubled your exertions to supply whatever seemed wanting, as the day for your embarkation drew near—you remember the uneasy apprehensions which disquieted your mind, as you moved from the shore—you well remember (for who can forget!) that dreary feeling of desolate loneliness which rushed upon you, as the cliffs of your native land looked faint and blue in the distance, and before you extended nothing but the wild waste of waters—that agony of regret, outmastering tears to relieve, in which you strained your eyes to catch the last glimpse of the dim outline of that dear, dear land, fast fading from your view. Some of you perhaps may remember, that from unskilful pilotage, from negligent watch, from indifference to the chart, or want of proper equipment to bear up against the shock of the tempests which sweep those seas, you and your hopes were all but lost on desert and savage

rocks, strewed with sad tokens of many a wreck,—you can recall the horror with which you then saw grim destruction confronting you, from which there appeared no escape, and the willingness with which you would have given worlds (had you possessed them) to save you from the frightful abyss which yawned around you,—and, oh! you cannot forget the thrill of joy, with which you at length traced out the expected land looming in the horizon, and, as you approached its shores, you saw for the first time the bright and lovely landscape of a new world, smiling beneath the beams of a new sun.

Do you not anticipate, my friends, the application of the parts of the illustration to which I have now directed your attention? Does not conscience, whose wont it is to recognise as aimed even the random shaft, perceive that the arrows, which this illustration directs on you, are feathered with experience, and barbed with conviction, and must strike home to the heart? Is it necessary for me, in explanation, to tell you, that men, who know that they must die, ought to make preparation for the dreary and perilous passage over death's cold flood—that you ought to bethink you in good season how valueless the things, which you now prize, will be hereafter, and that it concerns you closely to lay in a store of those spiritual qualities, which are needed in the country which lies beyond the grave. Is it necessary for me to remind you, how imprudent—how cruel—it is to suffer the immortal spirit to be launched into eternity without resources—how rash—how mad it is to defer all preparation for this voyage, whilst we have health, and time and opportunity, and only resolve to arrange all our concerns of time and of eternity within the brief interval which elapses between the signal of sickness and the departure of the soul; and this too, although we know not how near the day or the hour may be in which this signal may be given, and even if we did, we could not anticipate as certain the delay of one single moment, for the resistless arm of death, with a sudden stroke, may sever the moorings which bind us to life, and instantaneously the loosened

spirit is sweeping across the ocean of eternity. Need I point out to you the similarity which exists between the feelings which overpowered you, as you were hurried onward from the land which contained the treasures of your heart, through an unknown sea to an unknown country, and those emotions, which cause the soul, whilst trembling on the wing, to suspend her flight, till she takes one last look at the loved scenes and objects which she is to leave behind, and nerves herself for the task of piercing through the dark atmosphere, by which her destination is curtailed from her sight? Need I explain to you what is shadowed forth by those wreck-covered rocks and that yawning abyss, or tell you that they are but the faint adumbration of the region and lake beyond the grave, where lost spirits dwell—a region so desert and savage that, compared with it, the howling wilderness on the platform of those bleak rocks is as Eden—and a lake, compared with the dismal moanings of whose ever restless waves, the roar of the surging breakers is as music's sweetest melody?—Need I trace out the features of resemblance between that thrill of joy which pervaded you, when, at the close of your voyage from the old world, you first looked on the waving woods and blooming verdure of this Western Continent, and that ecstasy of rapture with which the spirit, having penetrated beyond the gloom of death, shall descry the celestial scenery of the Heavenly Canaan, without sun or moon, yet sparkling in the brightness which emanates from God and from the Lamb?

But, my brethren, it is now time to enquire, what are the practical duties which arise from this view of death, as a migration from earth to heaven, and what effect our expectation of reaching this land ought to exercise on our conduct whilst we sojourn here.

Our first and most obvious duty is to read with diligence, humility, and prayer all that has been revealed regarding it. Having implored the assistance of the Spirit, which is never refused to those who ask in earnest, we should

study the Word of God, that we may understand and appreciate the characteristics of that country which we seek.—Fully to comprehend this subject we dare not hope, for how can the understanding of man conceive, or how can the language of earth describe the dwelling of the Almighty?—"Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." But yet even "the Pisgah view," which the sacred volume enables us to take, embraces so much of its glory, that we shall love to linger on the prospect, and even when we come down from the height, on which "we viewed the landscape o'er," the thought of those scenes of bliss, which lay beyond Jordan's flood, will encourage us to persevere in our efforts to reach it, and nerve us for the passage of that cold stream which parts us from it.

But we should not merely read about it—it should be the subject of our frequent meditation—we should dwell on the thought of its inhabitants, of its occupations, of its bliss, of its glory, till its animating and purifying influence pervades us, so that we catch by anticipation some portion of those feelings, which we shall know perfectly when we are there.

And yet even this, my friends, is not enough. The knowledge, which we derive from these sources, will abundantly prove to any rational man, that it will be to his inestimable advantage to reach that land, and to his incalculable loss to be excluded from it; but, alas! mere contemplation of its blessings, or mere desire to participate in them, will not place us on its "radiant shore." No! we must determine, let the effort cost us what it may, to leave every thing behind which would detain or delay us. We must move onward in our heavenly course, with a steady resolution, like that with which you tore yourselves from "the homesteads by the brook and in the glen," and pressed on to the port at which you were to embark. This determination may produce alienation of feeling amongst those, whose good opinion we would wish to preserve, and affection and friendship may twine their

arms around to hold us back; but stay we dare not,—“He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me.” The occupations and pursuits, which habit has wound around us, if they beseem not the resolute traveller, must be laid aside—the burthens which retard us must be thrown down—impediments must be removed—difficulties must be overcome—troubles must be endured. But you may suggest—these are hard sayings, who is equal to them? If we trust to our own strength, my brethren, there is not one amongst us, no, not one individual, who will have either the strength of mind to commence, or the unflinching fortitude to continue his journey amidst so many discouragements to go on, so many temptations to stop. What then do we require for this work?—Blessed be God for his mercy! what we require he is more willing to give than we are to ask for—the sustaining and strengthening influence of his Spirit, which at once excites and increases our energies, guides us in difficulties, extricates us in danger, cheers us in trouble, and leads us in security to the end of our journey.

But it remains to notice other duties, at which, although of paramount importance, time will permit me to take but a cursory glance. So far we have spoken but of those things which are requisite during the period previous to that day on which we must launch forth on the waters of death. We have now to consider what supplies are necessary for that gloomy and perilous passage,—what preparation we should make, whereby nature may be supported in this hour of her severest trial and most urgent need. My brethren, man has but one friend who can give those supplies,—but one, who can sustain him when sinking beneath the combined pressure of overwhelming regret and dreadful apprehension; but that friend is one who knows and feels for the infirmity of our nature—one, who has himself experienced the agonies of that hour, and therefore understands what relief we require—one, who has crossed those dark and troubled waters, and has returned to tell us that our barks, though frail, are yet able to bear up against

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the waves, and weather the storms of those seas—one, who has promised (and his promise he has never—never—broken) to pilot all who trust in him, in safety to the haven of rest. My friends, is this all-powerful—this all-merciful Being—your friend?—Have you placed your confidence in Him, and can you rest with sweet assurance on the certain hope, that when every thing else fails you, He will befriend, support, and guide you? If you have—then death has no terrors, which can scare you. If you have not—the help of all the world beside, with all its appliances, expedients and resources, will be as useless as all the perfect equipment of spars and sails, and splendid fitting and precious cargo are to a foundering and sinking vessel. But do we require nothing more? Is not some preparation requisite for the land in which we are to live—some adaptation of our tastes and pursuits, that the occupations of the celestial world may not be uncongenial and abhorrent to the inclinations and habits which we have fostered here? Yes! the sacred volume assures us, that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord,” and “that God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.”—We must bear in mind, that this world is designed by the Governor of the universe, as a state—not merely of probation, but also of moral discipline—a school, where we are to learn the rudiments of heaven, and be educated for our high destination. We are to study and practice on earth those elementary principles, without the knowledge of which, the language and science of heaven would be unintelligible, and celestial pursuits laborious and irksome. Are we, my friends, engaged in this work of preparation? “Heaven is the abode of peace!” Do we cherish the tempers, and cultivate the practice of peace towards all around us? “Heaven is the abode of love!” Do we feel and manifest in our disposition, and words, and manner, and actions, love towards God—love towards our neighbour? “Heaven is the abode of holiness!” Do we encourage holy thoughts—do we use holy language—do we engage in holy pursuits? Permit me, my brethren, with affectionate earnestness, to press these important questions on your most serious attention.

By the answers which you can give to them, you may test your meetness for that home which you hope to reach.

But you yet require one thing more—you need a robe—the robe of righteousness—which mortal man never made nor purchased for himself. You require a garment, suitable for presenting yourselves before the eye of him “to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid.” This garment you can neither make nor earn nor buy. Terrestrial material and mortal texture cannot supply the attire which beseems the residents of heaven—human power could not weave from the combined merits of the human race the garment, which could cover you from the piercing scrutiny of an omniscient judge,—all the deserts of all mankind could not claim for you that vesture as your due—all the treasures, that art has wrested from their hiding places in the veins of earth, or cells of ocean—ay—with all which glisten in the secret mine, or gleam in the unfathomed cavern, could not purchase for you that robe. No, my brethren, you must receive it as a free gift from the Lord our Righteousness; and fear not, however unworthy you may be either to obtain or to ask it, that he will decline to hear your humble petition, or refuse to grant the object of your earnest prayer. But I must rapidly bring this discourse to a conclusion. I cannot terminate it, however, without noticing a point in which the parallel that we have drawn between death and emigration, may be considered as imperfect and even erroneous. Those who emigrate, pass from their native land to a foreign country; but those who die in the Lord, return from a foreign country home. It is true that that home wants the familiarity of scene, which is associated with the residence of our youth, and memory may not recognise its features, but still it is our home—the dwelling of our Father, who invites us to come under his paternal roof, and is ready to receive and welcome us on our return—the dwelling of loved relatives and friends, whose places by our firesides are vacant, and whom we fondly hope to meet there, where we shall never more part—the

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That it may be the portion of all, who hear me, of us and
 ours, however separated or divided on earth, to meet in the
 happy home of that better land, may that merciful Father,
 in his infinite goodness, grant,—by whose word we are taught,
 that “many shall come from the east and from the west, and
 shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the
 kingdom of heaven.”